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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND RANGER BATTALION  
IN THE HURTGEN FOREST, 6 - 8 DECEMBER, 1944.  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal experience of a platoon leader)

Type of operation described: A RANGER  
BATTALION ATTACKING AND DEFENDING KEY  
TERRAIN.

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OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND RANGER BATTALION  
IN THE HURTGEN FOREST, 6-8 DECEMBER, 1944  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal experience of a platoon leader)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph concerns the operations of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, in an attack and defense of key terrain within the Hurtgen Forest during the Rhineland Campaign, 6 to 8 December, 1944. It is primarily a small unit action, only one of many such actions which took place as the American forces slowly pushed forward toward the Rhine River - the last formidable obstacle before the final drive into the heart of Germany.

To establish a purpose and mission of the operation outlined herein, it is necessary that events leading up to early December, 1944 be described in some detail.

GENERAL SITUATION

During the early days of December, 1944, and prior to the German counter-offensive (commonly called the 'Battle of the Bulge'), the Allied Armies were situated generally along the western border of Germany." In the north, or on the left flank, was the 21st Army Group, composed of the Canadian First Army and the British Second Army. In the central sector of the front was the 12th Army Group, composed of the Ninth U. S. Army, the First U. S. Army and the Third U. S. Army. In the south, or on the right flank, was the 6th Army Group consisting of the Seventh U. S. Army and the French First Army. (1)

(1) See Map A.

On 21 October, 1944, 12th Army Group issued certain instructions to the Ninth, First and Third U. S. Armies. These instructions directed a general attack to the east. The objective assigned to the First Army was to "reach the Rhine River in the vicinity of COLOGNE and BONN and to seize a bridgehead across the Rhine River should such a situation develop". If the possibility of seizing a bridgehead across the Rhine did not develop, the First Army would adopt as its secondary mission the clearing of all enemy in the area bounded on the south by the Moselle River, on the north by COLOGNE and on the east by the Rhine River. (2)

*map A*  
In coordination with this mission assigned to the First Army, the Ninth Army was directed to launch an attack at the same time with the purpose of "protecting the left, or north flank of the First Army". The 12th Army Group instructions also directed that the left, or north boundary of the First Army be determined by the zone in which First Army would make its main effort. The Third Army was directed "to advance to the Rhine River in the MAINZ-WORMS area, seize a bridgehead if possible, with a secondary mission of clearing enemy from the area north to the Moselle River. (2) (*See MAP B & map A*)

#### FIRST ARMY SITUATION

*(See MAP B)*

The First U. S. Army, at the time of this 12th Army Group order, consisted of the VII Corps, the V Corps and the VIII Corps. VII Corps was on the left, or north flank; V Corps was in the central sector; VIII Corps was on the south, or right flank. (3)

(2) A-11, pg. 98-99 (3) See Map B. ✓

Included in the First Army sector was a wooded area of approximately fifty square miles called the Hurtgen Forest. This forest is within a triangle formed roughly by the cities AACHEN-DUREN-MONSCHAU. First Army troops entered this forest for the first time in September, and were still attempting to clear the area of enemy at this time. (4)

Acting on the directive issued by 12th Army Group, First Army Headquarters issued a letter of instructions on the 26 October verifying the Army Group order and the alteration of Corps boundaries directed by this order. (i.e.- boundary between armies to be determined by the First Army's main effort). First Army's instructions of 26 October further outlined plans and missions for the VII, V and VIII Corps. The plans were: (5)

1. "V Corps would initiate a preliminary operation with mission of securing the area formed by VOSSENACK-SCHMIDT-STRAUCH".
2. "VII Corps would make a coordinated attack in the direction of DUREN-COLOGNE. The mission was to penetrate the enemy's positions and reach the Rhine River in vicinity of COLOGNE". (this being the main effort, First Army boundary became the left flank of VII Corps)
3. "When VII Corps accomplished its mission of penetrating the enemy's positions, V Corps was to be prepared to advance to BONN on Army orders".
4. "VIII Corps was assigned the mission of conducting an aggressive defense within its zone and to make preparations for an advance on KOBLENZ on Army order".

A tentative date for the preliminary operation, that of V Corps, was set for 1 November.

Between 26 October and 1 November, the offensive activity within the First Army zone was limited to minor gains and preparations for the coming offensive. (6)

#### V CORPS SITUATION

The V Corps at this time was composed of the 28th Infantry Division, the 9th Infantry Division, the 4th Infantry Division and the 5th Armored Division. (7)

The 28th Division was on the north flank where it had relieved the 9th Division; the 4th Division was on the south flank and was to revert to VII Corps after 1 November; the 9th Division had moved to an assembly area on relief by the 28th and constituted a part of the Corps reserve; the 5th Armored Division was holding the central portion of the line with some units as Corps reserve. (8) *note*

V Corps, whose mission was the preliminary operation outlined by First Army directive, initiated action to accomplish this task. Corps assigned the VOSSENACK-SCHMIDT-STRAUCH objective to the 28th Division with directions on 23 October to prepare for the attack between 26 October and 1 November. (7)

On 1 November, the 2nd Ranger Battalion was attached to V Corps from VII Corps and the Corps in turn attached the battalion to Combat Command A, 5th Armored Division. This force had a mission of an attack from LAMMERSDORF to seize high ground in vicinity of KESTERNICH and establish a line generally LAMMERSDORF-SIMMERATH-KESTERNICH. This operation would commence on the seizure of

(6)A-1,pg.68 (7)A-3,pg.284 (8) See Map C.

*See much on November 5th action of 20th Div.*

SCHMIDT by the 28th Division. (9)

On 1 November, the 28th Division attacked with its objective the VOSSENACK-SCHMIDT-STRAUCH triangle. This attack continued until 14 November against heavy enemy resistance and resulted in partial accomplishment of the assigned mission. Due to the severe casualties suffered by the 28th Division in this attack, particularly in the SCHMIDT area, V Corps directed that the 8th Division, from VIII Corps, would relieve the 28th Division commencing 19 November and continue the mission. (10) Until relieved by the 8th Division, the 28th Division was instructed to organize defensive positions in place and cease offensive action against SCHMIDT. (11)

*This is not  
meant to be  
action on 6-8 Dec*

The 2nd Ranger Battalion was directed to relieve part of the 28th Division and act as counterattack force until relieved by the 8th Division. After relief by the 8th Division, the battalion would revert to attachment with 5th Armored Division. The Rangers relieved a battalion on the 14 November in vicinity of VOSSENACK and were relieved by 8th Division on 20 November. (10)

Relief of the 28th Division was completed on 20 November. On this date, First Army reattached Combat Command 'R', 5th Armored Division, to V Corps from VII Corps where this unit had been operating. V Corps attached this Combat Command to the 8th Division.. (10)

To continue on its assigned mission, V Corps directed the 8th Division to attack on 21 November. Objective

(9)A-3,pg.288 (10)A3,Pg.308 (11)A3,Pg.304



of this attack was to be the towns of HURTGEN and KLEINHAU, generally northeast of the 28th Division objective and through a portion of the 4th Division sector. (12,13,14) To support this attack, V Corps secured an air strike and 32 tons of bombs were dropped on enemy in the vicinity of BERGSTEIN <sup>where</sup> by medium bombers of the 9th Tactical Air Force. This air strike had little effect on this operation as it was delivered too early.<sup>?</sup> (15)

The 8th Division continued its attack until 28 November when the town of HURTGEN was finally seized. (16)

With the seizure of HURTGEN, V Corps was directed by First Army on 29 November to seize the towns of KLEINHAU, BRANDENBURG and BERGSTEIN in addition to their initial assigned mission. (13,17)

Acting on First Army orders, V Corps directed the 8th Division to seize the high ground in the BERGSTEIN area. (18)

The 8th Division, with Combat Command 'R' and the 2nd Ranger Battalion attached, (19) attacked 1 December and continued until 3 December at which time they had established a line generally north and southwest of BERGSTEIN. Combat Command 'R' succeeded in seizing KLEINHAU during this attack. (18) Three air strikes were made against BERGSTEIN during the time of this attack but the enemy still occupied BERGSTEIN. (20)

With the 8th Division reaching open terrain in vicinity of BRANDENBURG-BERGSTEIN, even though it was limited, it permitted the employment of armor. (21)

(12)A-3,pg.310 (13)See Map D (14)A-3,pg.316 (15)A-1,pg.79  
(16)A-3,pg.319 (17)A-1,pg.83 (18)A-3,pg.320 (19)A-3,pg.327  
(20)A-1,pg.85-86 (21)A-3,pg.324

At 0800, 3 December Combat Command 'R' attacked from the vicinity of KLEINHAU and succeeded in seizing BRAND-ENBURG.(23) Continuing the attack on 5 December, the Combat Command captured BERGSTEIN. (23) Air strikes by 9th Tactical Air Force and artillery support from the 8th Division Artillery and the 32nd Field Artillery Brigade aided the Combat Command in accomplishing its mission. (24)

Early the following day, 6 December, the enemy attempted to eject the armored forces from BERGSTEIN, due to its tactical importance. Three counterattacks were launched by the enemy, some of which were supported by self-propelled fire. These counterattacks failed to eject the forces from BERGSTEIN but succeeded in occupying some buildings in the eastern sector of town. (23,25)

#### 2ND RANGER BATTALION SITUATION

During the preliminary phase of V Corps operations, the 2nd Ranger Battalion had been attached to the 8th Division along with Combat Command 'R' for the attack of 1 December. While the attack of the 8th Division was progressing toward KLEINHAU-BRANDENBURG-BERGSTEIN, the Ranger battalion was located in an assembly area some two thousand yards southwest of VOSSENACK. The battalion had moved into this assembly area when relieved from the defensive positions in VOSSENACK-GERMETER by the 8th Division. Due to casualties suffered while occupying these defensive positions, the Ranger companies were under-  
\* strength, some as much as fifty per cent. (26)†

(23)A-3,pg.324 (24)A-1,pg.85-86 (25)See Map D (26)Personal knowledge.

The 8th Division had assigned the Ranger battalion  
\* the mission of serving as a mobile counterattack force to  
be used should an enemy counterattack threat develop in  
the division sector. V Corps maintained control of the  
battalion as it was considered a part of the Corps  
reserve.

During the period 20 November to 6 December, the  
Rangers had been training in 'alerts' and rapid movements  
to various areas wherein the enemy would likely attack.  
As a Ranger battalion is not normally considered mobile,  
V Corps attached a platoon from a Quartermaster truck  
company, which gave the battalion sufficient transport-  
ation to remain mobile. (27)

*not necessary*

The Ranger battalion commander placed a time limit  
of thirty minutes for the unit to be mobile, which in-  
cluded rolling packs and moving to the truck area several  
hundred yards away. On one occasion, when the column  
of the battalion was moving from the assembly area on  
a 'dry-run', it was strafed by enemy aircraft. At  
another time, the battalion officers were reconnoitering  
possible threat areas when an enemy artillery observer  
sighted the group and fired a barrage. No casualties  
were suffered on either of these occasions but the  
battalion did have several casualties, while in their  
assembly area, from enemy artillery fire. (28) Worth  
mentioning is the manner in which these casualties  
occurred, and it might be termed typical of the  
Hurtgen Forest.

(27) Personal knowledge (28) A-7, pg. 11, Book III

*See map D*  
Once a week, whenever possible, the battalion S-2 presented the combat situation to the unit, assembling one platoon for each presentation. Danger of enemy artillery fire prevented any larger group being assembled. \* During one of these presentations, a platoon of C Company was grouped around the situation map. One enemy shell struck a tree directly over the group, causing a tree-burst, killing two men and wounding nine others. (29)

#### BATTALION MISSION

*SEE map D*  
At approximately 2100, 6 December, the Ranger battalion was released from V Corps reserve to the 8th Division. (30) ~~The mission assigned to the Rangers was the capture of the high ground east of the town of SCHMITZ and the small ridges running south and east from SCHMITZ.~~ \* *See map P.* (31) Capture of this critical terrain, later known as Hill 400, was deemed essential as from these high points observation of the whole area was possible, including the key town of SCHMITZ and the River ~~and~~. (29) The enemy was utilizing this terrain as observation points to place observed fire on friendly units throughout this portion of the Corps area. (29)

After receiving orders for this mission, the Ranger's battalion commander issued a fragmentary order alerting the battalion and directing the company commanders to report for orders and instructions (29)

(29) Personal knowledge (30) A-3, pg. 324 (31) See Map D

What was  
the situation?

On reporting to the command post, the company commanders were given the situation and battalion mission.

Were any  
instructions  
issued  
the move to  
BERGSTEIN?

An attack was to take place as soon as the battalion could move to the vicinity of BERGSTEIN. Companies A, B and C would seize and hold the small ridges running south and east from BERGSTEIN. These companies would prepare defensive positions to repel possible enemy attacks from south or east, and also be prepared to act as a counterattack force if necessary. The other three companies, D, E and F, would attack from BERGSTEIN, seize and hold the high ground (Hill 400) east of the town. These companies would organize defensive positions against enemy attacks from the east and northeast. Tentative time set for the main attack against Hill 400 was 0700, 7 December. The preliminary operation southeast of the town would be initiated on arrival of the battalion at BERGSTEIN. Success of the preliminary operation would determine the exact time of the <sup>DEFIN</sup>main attack. (32, 33)

While the company commanders were with the battalion commander, the companies were rolling their packs and bedrolls and securing equipment to move out. A one day supply of K rations had been previously issued to each man for such an occasion as this, and as each man had his basic load of ammunition there were no supply problems. In spite of the training period and practicing 'alerts', there was still some confusion. This, however, was due to the darkness and strict blackout. (32)

(32) Personal knowledge (33) A-7, pg. 14, Book III

The company commanders returned to their companies at 2200 and briefed their platoon leaders. Due to the urgency of time, the briefing was incomplete. The platoon leaders attempted to brief the platoon sergeants and section leaders but under the circumstances could not give them the proper orientation. After arriving at BERGSTein sufficient time was available to orient all the subordinate leaders, but prior to leaving the assembly area there were a lot of unanswered questions.(34)

\*  
*started from  
mainly  
area 2000 yds  
SW of 1000 yds*  
The battalion loaded onto trucks, and moving generally northeast, arrived in the vicinity of HURTGEN.(35)

This trip, of approximately ten miles, took over two hours due to blackout, the poor condition or absence of roads and a steady rain which started falling while enroute. Detrucking at HURTGEN, the battalion formed and moved off in column with A Company leading, adopting a five yard interval between men as it progressed. The detrucking at HURTGEN was necessary due to enemy artillery fire on the roads forward and the possibility of the enemy discovering the battalion's presence.(34)

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6-7 DECEMBER

Moving on foot from HURTGEN, the Rangers followed the road to BRANDENBURG and thence to BERGSTein, arriving on the northwest edge of town at 0200 where the battalion commander halted the column. (35) At this point, the company commanders went forward to receive further orders and make a reconnaissance of the area.

(34) Personal knowledge (35) See Map D

not mentioned  
before

Guides from the armored elements in BERGSTEIN failed to meet the company commanders at prearranged points so the reconnaissance was completed without assistance but consumed valuable time. Coordination was established with the armored commander during this time by the Ranger commander after locating the command post. (36)

artillery  
placing  
mortar  
fire.

During the march and while halted, enemy artillery was placing harassing fire on the BRANDENBURG-BERGSTEIN road, and mortar fire on the town of BERGSTEIN. Friendly artillery and tanks from positions to the rear were placing occasional fire on Hill 400. Some buildings in BERGSTEIN were burning due to these and previous fires, and aided the Rangers in orienting themselves. (37) The battalion suffered no casualties from the enemy fire but the rain and seeking cover in roadside ditches had drenched men and equipment. ~~When the column halted, some of the men found cover from the rain and enemy fires by placing themselves under tanks and rail tracks which had been disabled by an enemy mine field across the road and along the edge of town.~~ <sup>See map</sup> (38) At the time the Rangers arrived on the edge of town, the mine field was being removed by engineers of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group to clear routes of communication. (39)

See map

See map  
page 24

The company commanders returned to their companies and at 0300 Companies A, B and C moved in column from the northwest edge of town to their assigned objective, the high ground southeast of town. No enemy was encountered during the move to these positions other than the enemy harassing artillery and mortar fires.

(36) Personal knowledge (37) A-7, pg. 14, Book III (38) See Map E (39) A-3, pg. 326.

*More detail needed*

Company A occupied positions previously prepared by the enemy before withdrawing. Companies B and C proceeded to prepare their defensive positions. All three companies had completed their occupation and preparation of defensive positions prior to daylight. (40,41)

Following the movement of Companies A, B, and C, Companies D, E, and F moved from the northwest edge of town to their tentative line of departure on the eastern edge of town. During this move, these companies found it necessary to clear ~~some houses of enemy~~ who had infiltrated into town during previous enemy counterattacks and darkness. ~~This enemy consisted of small harassing elements,~~ offering little resistance and were quickly eliminated. Several enemy were taken prisoner with no casualties suffered by the Rangers. (42)

In the early morning hours, Companies A, B, and C southeast of town observed enemy vehicles, probably self-propelled guns, several hundred yards to their front, or south of BERGSTein. An artillery concentration was requested by A Company through the battalion command post and adjustment of fire made by the men on the front line. One tank of the 5th Armored elements in town also fired on these vehicles. <sup>Neither the</sup> Results of this fire, nor the exact type of vehicle could be determined due to the ground haze. The enemy vehicles did take cover after the fire. (42)

Companies D, E, and F, from their positions on the eastern edge of town, crossed their line of departure in a general skirmish line at approximately 0700. (41)

(40)A-3,pg.324 (41) See Map E (42)Personal knowledge.



See (u) page 24.  
These companies moved rapidly across the open ground between Hill 400 and BERGSTein and assaulted the hill. Enemy ground resistance was relatively light but accurate small arms fire and enemy shells falling in the area caused some casualties. The majority of the hill defenders, evidently a delaying force, withdrew to wooded areas east of the hill position. (43)

Information should have been given in text with footnote to show source  
Enemy troops defending this terrain were later identified through prisoner interrogation. From the Intelligence Operations, V Corps in Europe, page 68, "The enemy defenses of the hill had been entrusted to a special task force created from the companies of 1955 Infantry Regiment (89th Infantry Division)".

At 0830, Companies D, E, and F reported by radio to the battalion command post that their mission was complete and the hill secure. (43,44)

While the attack on the hill was in progress, and once the enemy determined an attack was in progress, heavy artillery and mortar fires were placed on BERGSTein and the BRANDENBURG-BERGSTein road. After the Rangers' seizure of the hill, the enemy shifted the weight of his fires onto the hill and used only intermittent mortar fires against the town itself. These fires came from enemy positions south and east of BERGSTein as well as from positions east of the Roer River. (45)

See (u) page 24  
\* As a result of the enemy fires on the hill, the companies began to suffer heavy casualties, having had no time to dig emplacements. Evacuation of wounded immediately became a serious problem.

(43)A-3,pg.324 (44)See Map E (45)Personal knowledge.

5 ent  
\*  
To cope with the casualty problem, the battalion medical officer moved the aid station into a church in the northeast part of town and established a dressing station in a pillbox on the Hill. Both of these installations were under the same fire that fell on the hill and town but of necessity had to be close to the troops. Despite the valiant efforts of the medical officer and his aid men, some casualties had to await darkness before receiving aid. The medical officer was killed by enemy mortar fire on the next day while performing his duties. (46)

Meanwhile, the companies southeast of town were receiving some casualties from enemy artillery and mortar fire but were not being depleted as was the force on the hill. (47)

Enemy fire continued falling in the area for the remainder of the day, varying in intensity. The enemy's southeast of town removed machine guns from disabled tanks and halftracks to incorporate into their main line of resistance. Preparations were made for the expected enemy counterattack. Communication between the battalion command post and the companies was provided. Radio had to be used almost entirely. Wire lines had been laid to the companies but these were continuously being severed by enemy fire. (47)

Between 1800 and darkness, the enemy launched two counterattacks against the companies on the hill. (48) Both of these attacks were preceded by artillery and mortar preparations on Hill 400 and BERGSTEIN.

(46)A-7,pg.16 Book III (47)Personal knowledge (48)See MapE

*more detail needed*

The attacking forces consisted of approximately 150 enemy infantry in both attacks. During the first attack, the enemy approached to within small arms range by following the artillery preparations; this attack was repulsed primarily with accurate small arms fire.

After being repulsed on the initial attack, the enemy withdrew and reorganized. The second attack saw the enemy employing fire and maneuver in an attempt to close with the Rangers. This attack was likewise repulsed by accurate small arms fire but only after the enemy succeeded in coming within close range.

The enemy attacks failed to make a penetration of the Ranger's positions but did succeed in causing more casualties by mortar and sniper fire. (49)

Late in the afternoon, the battalion commander ordered A Company from its positions southeast of town into BERGSTEIN. A Company was to act as a reserve and counterattack force should the need arise. (50)

This company was further assigned the mission of eliminating any enemy that succeeded in surrounding the companies on the hill, or infiltrated into the town to harass friendly troops. Some enemy snipers were believed to be in parts of the town but there was no confirmation on this. (50)

(49)A-2,pg.68 (50)A-7,pg.15, Book III.

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During the night, enemy patrols were active attempting to infiltrate through and around the hill position to cut off the companies' supply and communication. These enemy attempts were unsuccessful, due in part to **extensive use of hand grenades** by the rangers. The enemy did capture one casualty when the litter bearers went for riflemen after being attacked. (51)

Artillery and mortar fire continued to fall intermittently throughout the area. On the southeast of town, Companies B and C altered their positions to close the gap left by the withdrawal of A Company. A patrol sent out from C Company attempted to obtain locations of enemy positions. Due to enemy fires and wooded terrain, the patrol returned without any new information. (51)

By utilizing all available medical and headquarters jeeps, all the casualties suffered during the day were evacuated. (51)

In the early morning hours, prior to daylight, the remainder of Combat Command 'R' withdrew to positions in the rear. (52) This unit originally seized BERGSTein and during its occupation of the town had suffered numerous casualties both in men and materiel. (51)

Prior to 0700 on the morning of 8 December, more heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire fell on Hill 400 and BERGSTein. Following the usual pattern, the enemy counterattacked at 0700 with a company of infantry supported by fire from armored vehicles. (53)

(51)Personal knowledge (52)A-1,pg 87 (53)See Map F.

This attack was aimed at the companies southeast of town. The enemy approached within small arms range before becoming disorganized. Again the enemy attack was repulsed by accurate small arms and automatic weapons fire. (54)

At 0900, the enemy forces made another attempt to dislodge the companies from Hill 400. (54) By this time, the three companies on the hill had been reduced to about one-third size due to casualties incurred the first day and night. This attacking force was smaller than previous ones but due to the weakness of the defense, reached a position 50-100 yards from the Ranger positions. Artillery support and small arms fire finally drove the enemy back. (55,56)

Before the 0900 attack struck the hill positions, an artillery forward observer from the 32nd Field Artillery Brigade had reported into the battalion command post. The artillery fires this observer directed aided the companies materially in driving back the enemy. One enemy group was caught between the artillery fires and friendly line by adjustment of fire between the companies and the observer...this group suffered heavy casualties. (56)

With the repulse of this last attack, the actions of the enemy were unbelievably quiet. The remainder of the morning saw only sporadic artillery and mortar fire landing in and around BERGSTein. (56)

During the afternoon, an armed reconnaissance mission of four 9th Air Force fighter-bombers (P-47s) was sighted above the area.

(54)A-2,pg.68 (55)See Map F (56)Personal knowledge.

This mission had not been requested by the Rangers but was a most welcome sight to the troops on the ground. The flight was either seeking targets of opportunity, or had been requested by units of the 8th Division <sup>which</sup> ~~which~~ were operating north and south of BERGSTein. Strafing and bombing, the flight attacked enemy positions several hundred yards southeast of the town, offering the ground troops a brief respite from enemy shelling. While strafing, some of the fire was delivered into the company positions southeast of town, but no casualties were suffered. (57)

At approximately 1700, the enemy again launched an attack, this time against both Ranger forces. This two pronged attack was preceded by heavy artillery and mortar preparations plus self-propelled fire on the troops southeast of town. Again the enemy was thrown back by fire, including a veritable 'curtain of fire' around the entire sector fired by the supporting artillery. Had it not been for these artillery fires, the enemy may have succeeded in this attack. Of all the enemy attacks, this final one offered the most dangerous threat as the entire battalion defense system had been weakened through numerous casualties inflicted by enemy fires. (58,59)

Failing on this attack, the enemy withdrew to his previous positions. The remainder of the day and night saw only harassing artillery and mortar fire falling in the sector. (57)

Late in the afternoon, information was received at the battalion command post that a relief would be affected that night. (57)

(57) Personal knowledge (58) A-2, pg. 68 (59) See Map F

The battalion commander alerted the companies for the move to the rear. Each company sent a guide to the battalion command post at 2000 to lead relieving units onto positions. At about 2200, the first elements of the 13th Infantry, 8th Division arrived at the command post and relief of the Ranger companies was started immediately. (60)

The companies on the hill were relieved first, with F Company moving into the lead. Relief of the entire battalion was accomplished at 2400.

To add to the discomfort of the depleted and weary Rangers, a heavy snow started falling early in the evening. As if to plague the unit, this snow continued until the battalion closed in its former assembly area. (61)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Well aware of the obstacle the ~~terrain~~ <sup>German</sup> ~~terrain~~ <sup>forces</sup> offered, the German commanders relied to the best of their ability. However, ~~concerned with econom-~~ <sup>not supported by terrain</sup> ~~izing their first class combat troops, the commanders~~ <sup>Key Point 1</sup> ~~relied heavily on supporting weapons, rather than an~~ <sup>see (2) page 24</sup> ~~organized line of resistance, to hold against the~~ ~~advance of our forces.~~ The economizing of forces was confirmed by the German Ardennes offensive in December. Nonetheless, an organized defense of the critical terrain around Bergstein could have ~~halted friendly attacks.~~

Further disadvantages of using miscellaneous troops and supporting weapons can be seen in the enemy's failure to penetrate the weakened Ranger defense line.

(60) A-8, pg. 43-44 (61) Personal knowledge

Similarly, enemy infiltration forces were too small to accomplish their mission, and lacked aggressiveness! An exposed position, such as the companies occupied on Hill 400, is highly vulnerable to infiltration or envelopment.

*enemy positioned not given in manuscript & not shown on maps.*

The Rangers attack on Hill 400 forced a salient into enemy positions. This salient being the most easterly point to which the Allies had driven, it offered the enemy the opportunity to place a mass of fires from three sides onto the attacking force. The ability of the enemy to mass and deliver these fires resulted in heavy casualties to the attacking force even after the objective had been seized. Total casualties in the Ranger battalion amounted to 135, including over two-thirds of the entire force that assaulted the hill.

*See (X) page 23*

*See (W) page 14 and page 19*

A coordinated attack, using supporting fires, would have lessened casualties in this operation. Sufficient time was not allowed for coordination outside of the companies, nor for obtaining supporting fires. This urgency of time, however, was due to the weakness of friendly units defending the area and the nature of the enemy held terrain.

*not a strong point name. says some casualties were taken implying a point.*

Artillery could have been used more effectively in the initial phases of this operation rather than at a later time. Counterbattery could possibly have eliminated some of the volume of fires the enemy was able to concentrate in the area.

A Ranger battalion should not be employed in the same manner as a regular infantry battalion. It is trained and equipped for special type missions and lacks strength or



weapons to organize a defensive position in depth. As all six line companies are normally committed at one time, it has no reserve nor any quantity of supporting weapons. The battalion, therefore, has to depend on such supporting fires as can be obtained. In this operation, even the 60mm mortars organic to each assault platoon, could not be successfully employed due to enemy fires, the terrain and difficulties of observation.

In a wooded area, such as the Hurtgen Forest, armor is confined, or canalized, and cannot be employed to its fullest advantage. The enemy can defend the natural avenues of approach with anti-tank weapons and mine fields thereby making the employment of tanks too costly to be practical. Combat Command 'R' could have possibly driven to the Roer River had its attack not stopped due to the confinement imposed by terrain around BERGSTein and the enemy's organization of the area for anti-tank defense.

### LESSONS

1. A heavily wooded sector offers excellent defensive possibilities if properly organized. This may be attested by casualty tables of units operating within the Hurtgen Forest for a 99 day period: (62)

9th Infantry Division (13 Sep-26 Oct)	- 3,835
28th Infantry Division (27 Oct-20 Nov)	- 3,611
4th Infantry Division (6 Nov-8 Dec)	- 5,260
Total for 99 days	12,707

2. Artillery fire is a potent weapon against an enemy either in the open or in wooded areas. Majority of casualties suffered on either side are from artillery or mortar fragments. Tree bursts or time fires utilize the maximum effect of shells.

*Not brought out this manuscript*

3. Artillery cannot offer close support to infantry in heavily wooded areas due to lack of observation and tree bursts endangering own troops.

4. Infantry troops, down to and including platoon level, should be trained in adjusting and directing artillery fire. An artillery forward observer cannot always be in position when needed.

*too general*

5. Armored units operating in heavily wooded areas should be employed only against limited objectives. Deployment and maneuver is extremely limited and exploitation virtually impossible.

*Can be minimized*

6. The capture of a critical terrain feature, without a defense in depth, leaves a unit vulnerable to envelopment or infiltration.

7. Infiltration tactics should employ sufficient and aggressive forces to successfully accomplish mission.

8. Communication, evacuation and supply are always difficult problems in any combat situation. Alternate methods of accomplishing each should be included in the training of a unit.

9. A coordinated and aggressive defense by a small force using supporting arms can defend critical terrain against a superior force.

*Can be minimized*

10. A successful attack depends on the ability to defend.